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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

Memorandum



THE SITUATION IN VIETNAM

Information as of 0600
20 March 1965

PREPARED FOR THE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL
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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Office of Current Intelligence
20 March 1965

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

The Situation in Vietnam as of 0600 EST

Results of 19 March Air Strike

1. Field analysis of post strike photography confirms that the North Vietnamese targets hit on the 19 March air strike suffered heavy damage.
2. The Phu Van supply depot received the most damage. This installation had some 75 buildings of which 35 were destroyed during the strike, 12 severely damaged, 15 sustained light to moderate damage and 10 were still burning at the time of the photography. In the town area north of the target, there were six buildings burning, one destroyed and one with heavy damage.
3. At the Phu Van ammunition depot, several miles north of the Phu Van supply depot, three buildings were destroyed, four heavily damaged and six others lightly damaged. This installation, half a mile wide, had considerable space for ammunition storage. The Phu Van army barracks was also hit. Two buildings were destroyed, 16 severely damaged, four lightly to moderately damaged, and two others were on fire.
4. The Vinh Son supply depot also suffered substantial damage. Three buildings were destroyed, one heavily damaged, nine lightly to moderately damaged, and two others were burning. In the town area north of the target, four buildings were destroyed and nine left burning.

Communist Military Reaction

5. No North Vietnamese, Communist Chinese, or Soviet military reaction has as yet been noted to the 19 March air strikes.

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Communist Political Reaction

8. North Vietnam has reacted to the 19 March air strike with its customary propaganda themes, but Peiping has not commented.

9. A 19 March Hanoi radio commentary denounced the US for expanding the war and boasted of North Vietnam's defense capability by alleging that three aircraft were shot down on 19 March. The broadcast urged the North Vietnamese people and armed forces to "deal fiercer blows" at the "US aggressors."

10. Peiping's shrill anti-US propaganda campaign continues unabated. On 19 March the Chinese staged a rally of more than 10,000 Chinese and foreign students in Peiping commemorating the 15th anniversary of the first alleged US intervention in Vietnam. Speeches at the rally repeated familiar demands that "US imperialism must withdraw every single man from South Vietnam" and "stop immediately all its aggression and interference in both the southern and northern parts of Vietnam."

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11. Gromyko's talks with the British this week confirm previous indications that the USSR does not consider the time ripe for formal initiatives in seeking a basis for negotiations on Vietnam. Gromyko told British Foreign Secretary Stewart that the USSR takes its Geneva conference co-chairman's duties "seriously" and believes one of its primary duties is to induce the US to "cease aggression" in Vietnam. He rebuffed Stewart's attempt to probe for conditions for a Geneva Conference.

12. Gromyko asserted that the US, as "the aggressor," has no right to attempt to set preconditions for negotiations. He further stated that until the US withdraws its demands for preconditions, there is "no point in engaging in hypothetical discussions about negotiations."

13. There has been no account of Gromyko's talks with Prime Minister Wilson on 18 March. In his press conference on 19 March, however, Gromyko was uncompromising in rejecting any possible discussion of convening a conference about the situation in Vietnam. He asserted that "those involved should have the first say on the possibility or impossibility of there being an international conference."

14. This is a further reflection of Moscow's unwillingness to run counter to North Vietnam on this issue. The Soviet foreign minister branded US forces in South Vietnam as "invaders," claiming that they are there as an "occupying power." He maintained that the very first step which must be taken is to stop aggression.

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South Vietnam Political Developments

22. Senior military officers continue to speculate on a possible attempt to oust General Minh as armed forces commander, or at least to strip him of his concurrent post as chief of the Joint General Staff, at a forthcoming Armed Forces Council (AFC) meeting. The date of the AFC meeting has been variously reported as this week end or on 24 March, but may not yet have been firmly set. [redacted] Air Vice Marshal Ky is pushing a particular candidate, allegedly known as pro-Buddhist, for

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the JGS post, but pressure to replace Minh as commander in chief may be diminishing.

23. The AFC secretary-general, Vice Premier and Defense Minister General Thieu, reportedly is supporting Minh at present but feels Minh can be quietly removed in two or three months if events dictate. Thieu is considered ambitious, but may believe that he can exercise his already considerable power through Minh for the time being.

24. Another general has commented that Minh is beginning to assert his authority and make decisions, but is still not as effective as General Khanh in the "diplomatic" job of visiting field generals, discussing and settling a few problems, and doling out lavish entertainment.

25. The three South Vietnamese civilians accused of sponsoring a subversive peace movement were deported to North Vietnam yesterday across the Demilitarized Zone. They were escorted to the Hien Luong bridge spanning the Ben Hai River by I Corps General Thi in mufti, the press, and some 2,000 spectators, all amid a propaganda exchange from loudspeakers in South Vietnamese and North Vietnamese territory. According to press reports, the three were welcomed by North Vietnamese guards across the river. A North Vietnamese broadcast praised their "legitimate act of struggle" in initiating a peace movement and claimed that the three refused the "threats and cajolery" of the South Vietnamese police who urged them to ask for leniency.

26. Colonel Nhan Minh Trang, former chief of Gia Dinh Province and one of the leaders of the 19 February coup attempt, surrendered to police on 15 March. According to General Dong, the Saigon military commander, Trang had received prior assurances of good care and special consideration from Police Director Colonel Lieu. General Dong believes that the Police Director has been close to Trang in the past, and also suspects that General Thi approved the surrender terms. Other key figures involved in the abortive coup, such as Colonel Pham Ngoc Thao and General Lam Van Phat, are still in hiding, although some GVN officials may know where they are.

Viet Cong Military Activity

27. The Viet Cong continued their pressure in the northern provinces of South Vietnam. On 17 March, the Voice of America transmitter site in the vicinity of Hue (Thua Thien Province) was shelled by Viet Cong mortar and heavy small arms fire. Preliminary reports indicate only surface damage to defensive walls and no damage to equipment. There were no VOA casualties and the station remains on the air. However, five government soldiers were wounded and two armored personnel carriers damaged when reinforcements enroute from Hue to the transmitter area were ambushed by the Viet Cong.

28. A Viet Cong weapons cache was uncovered on 19 March after ARVN elements in II Corps were led to the site by an informer. Six hundred Mauser rifles have been recovered, and an International Control Commission team is being flown to the site. With regard to the Viet Cong junk sunk off Quang Tri Province on 15 March, underwater demolition teams have begun recovery operations and initial reports indicate that about 70 Russian-type carbines have been recovered so far, along with a box of detonators and six boxes of small arms ammunition.

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